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ABSTRACT

The importance of school organization and its impact on teachers' commitment to staff development has been highlighted in recent research. In schools that are favorably disposed toward staff development, the norms of "collegiality" and "experimentation" prevail. Staff practices fundamental to the creation and maintenance of the two norms are identified, along with practices by principals that foster continuous staff professional growth. The implications of these findings for school leadership in Australian schools are discussed and six propositions to guide future research are presented. (MLF)

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THE SOCIAL ORGANISATION OF SCHOOLS AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT PRACTICES

AUGUST 1984

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The principal can make a significant contribution to the staff development of the teachers within his/her school. The authors in this issue report on some of the research findings and the implications they hold for school leadership in the practical context of Australian schools (Ed).

THE SOCIAL ORGANISATION OF SCHOOLS AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT PRACTICES

Patrick Duignan and Neil Johnson

INTRODUCTION

Staff development is a learning process for all involved. Its primary role is either to bring about a modification of attitudes, skills and/or behaviours or reinforce desirable attitudes and/or behaviours. Staff development is a subtle and complex process in which inservice courses and programmes can make a worthwhile contribution, but the real development takes place in the action arena of the educational organisation. The philosophy for staff development proposed in this paper is that the working environment of the school is replete with challenges and opportunities which can be used to encourage staff to improve their practices. The implication of this philosophy is that staff development should not be considered as a discrete task or specific programme in which staff are expected to participate once or twice a year: rather, it should be regarded as a fundamental and ongoing process which is part of the everyday operation of the school. In other words, the desire for development must be embodied in the philosophy, ethos and organisation of the school and it should permeate every aspect of its life.

The importance of the organisation of the school as a workplace and its impact on teachers' commitment to staff development has been highlighted in recent research conducted in North America (Little, 1980) and in Australia (Duignan, 1982; Johnson, 1983). The remainder of this paper will present a summary of, and commentary on, the insights provided in these research studies for our understanding of the characteristics of school organisation that encourage teachers' involvement in staff development.

SOCIAL ORGANISATION OF THE SCHOOL

Little (1981) reported on a one year study which she conducted to explore some of the ways in which "the social organization of the school as a workplace bears upon teachers' involvement in and receptivity toward new practices and upon their involvement in formal or informal occasions of learning on the job." (p. 1) She concluded that the success of staff development activities - structured or unstructured, formal or informal - depends significantly upon prevailing attitudes within the organisation in which it is hoped that new ideas will be implemented. She highlighted the fact that an attitude supportive of staff development must be part of the entire staff belief system if professional growth is to occur in a school.

The group attitude toward staff development is to a large extent, according to Little governed by the nature and extent of interpersonal relationships within the school. In fact, teachers' expectations of their own roles and responsibilities are largely shaped by their work relationships. Favourable work interactions are those which generate and reinforce growth-oriented attitudes or expectations.

Little (1981) further concluded that two types of group (staff) norms, or expectations, prevail in schools that are favourably disposed toward staff development:

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> Without denying differences in individuals' skills, interests, commitment, curiosity, or persistence, the prevailing pattern of interactions and interpretations in each (school) demonstrably creates certain possibilities and sets certain limits. ... Most at issue here are the nature and extent of collegial relationships among teachers and between faculty and administrators, and the nature of the stance adopted toward present practice and new ideas. Teachers' vivid portrayals of the job show how routine work arrangements and daily encounters with other adults in schools strongly shape expectations for "being a teacher". Their descriptions led us to characterise schools and groups within schools by their participation in norms (shared expectations) for shared work (collegiality) and norms for the analysis and evaluation of practice (experimentation, or continuous improvement) (p.7).

These two norms of collegiality and experimentation need further elaboration.

In attempting to delineate the dominant growth-promoting staff relationships, Little (1981) suggested that two group attitudes, or norms of expectation, act as "powerful organizational forces" for continuing staff development. Collegiality refers to the existence in a school of staff expectations for extensive sharing of work, that is, a general attitude that teachers will, as a matter of course, work together on planning, discussing, designing and evaluating teaching activities. It involves a reliance on one another's skills, knowledge and experience and so provides continuing opportunity for staff to learn from one another. Experimentation, or continuous improvement, refers to a group expectation that teachers will, as a routine matter, evaluate strategies in order to continually improve classroom practice, safe in the knowledge that risk-taking is accepted at the school as a necessary aspect of teaching.

Little (1981) identified four dominant practices as constituting specific and measurable interactive teacher behaviours fundamental to the creation and maintenance of the two norms of collegiality and experimentation. These are:

1 Shared talk. Regular talk occurs among staff, not about personalities or failings of staff, students, administrators or parents, but about specific classroom practices. Spare periods, lunch times and other opportunities for staff interaction are taken up by discussions of existing and intended approaches to teaching. In addition, frequent teacher discussion of classroom practice leads to the development of a "shared language" which aids communication and itself encourages talk.

2 Mutual observation. Teachers engage in regular observation of one another's classes, criticising and evaluating practices in a constructive, non-personal and practical manner. This practice also creates concrete situations for the discussion of teaching practices.

3. Joint preparation. As a matter of course, curriculum and materials are planned and prepared together by staff. This joint preparation serves the threefold purpose of: (i) sharing the burden of programme development, (ii) improving teachers' understanding of their work as a result of interaction, and (iii) making possible greater improvements in teaching attainment.

4 Teaching each other. Teachers and administrators, frequently, teach or inform each other about teaching strategies. This practice is said to enhance the range and repertoire of strategies available to individual teachers.

Little (1981) is convinced of the importance of these practices:

> These four types of practices so clearly distinguish the more successful from the less successful schools, the more adaptable from the less adaptable schools, that we have termed them the "critical practices of adaptability". (p. 13)

Little also highlighted a number of qualities related to the application of the four critical teacher practices which improve the school's capacity for developing the desired norms of collegiality and experimentation. These teacher practices are said to be more effectively achieved where:

1 a higher proportion of teacher interaction time is spent on practical, purposeful talk, and a larger combination or range of the four practices is employed;
2 a range of locations is used as settings for interaction. In Little's (1981) words:

> In successful and adaptable schools, all four classes of 'critical practice' occur widely throughout the building and throughout the work week; training sessions, faculty meetings, grade or department meetings, hallways, classrooms, office and teachers' lounge. Collegial experimentation is a way of life; it pervades the school. (p. 16);

3 there is a high frequency of interaction in general;
4 a specific and practical focus is maintained in teachers' discussons;
5 teachers accept sharing and experimentation as a relevant and necessary part of their job;
6 interaction is seen as being of reciprocal benefit to all staff, and there is a high level of mutual confidence that care will always be taken to criticise one another's practices in a non-personal and patient way;
7 the desired interactive behaviour includes a large proportion of the faculty and staff members as participants; and
8 highly respected teachers, who have the necessary characteristics to exercise most influence on the norms of collegiality and experimentation and who could encourage less expert teachers to participate in group interaction, take the initiative and provide leadership.

Little, therefore, as a result of her research identified two norms (collegality and experimentation) that contributed to a positive attitude among staff in a school toward staff development. She also isolated four critical practices, and a number of qualities related to the application of these practices, that help generate the norms of collegiality and experimentation in schools. In addition, Little's research highlighted one other very important factor or influence in a school that was central to the "creation" of a staff commitment to staff development. This factor was the role that the principal played or could play in developing the desirable norms.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE PRINCIPAL

Little (1981) concluded that school principals by virtue of (a) position and (b) performance are in a unique position to establish and maintain the important norms of collegiality and experimentation, and to promote and foster the critical practices of talk about practice, observation of practice, joint preparation of materials, and teaching each other about teaching. Principals can encourage these "critical practices" in five ways:

1 Announcing Expectations

Principals should announce their expectations for

shared talk, shared work, frank review of present practices, and the need to investigate alternative approaches. They need to give clear messages to teachers as to what these expectations entail. Such expectations can be announced at staff meetings, followed by regular and frequent reminders in a variety of settings. This practice by principals helps create an atmosphere of support for creativity and innovativeness.

2 Enacting Expectations

Principals' behaviours must "model" the norms if they are to progressively build these expectations into regular staff practices. This requires that principals express interest in trying new teaching and administrative approaches in their own work (experimentation) and indicate their desire to receive staff feedback about these new practices (collegiality).

3 Sanctioning Behaviour

Through visible sanctions of teachers' behaviours, principals can encourage or discourage collegial or experimenting practices. Principals, according to Little, must encourage success in schools by rewarding collegiality and experimentation and by imposing sanctions to discourage isolation and indifference at work. She suggested that principals could exercise this sanctioning behaviour in a number of ways, such as by (a) changing the distribution of school resources, for example, in teaching loads and timetabling; (b) exercising control over access to outside resources, through release time assistance and support for consultant advice; and (c) formal and informal public displays of good favour for desired teacher performance.

4 Protecting Positive Behaviour

Principals should protect teachers who display collegial attitudes and who risk new methods from school and community criticism; and

5 Initiating Collaborative Programmes of Staff Development

Finally, Little recommended that principals must initiate within the school, programmes of staff development in which outside consultants work with the school's staff in developing and implementing the four critical practices that are conducive to professional growth.

In a summary statement related to the principal's role, Little (1981) stated:

> The broader the repertoire of tactics for announcing, enacting, sanctioning, and protecting interactions that are collegial and experimental, the greater the principal's influence over norms that bear on school success. (p. 30)

APPLICATION OF LITTLE'S FINDINGS TO THE AUSTRALIAN SETTING

Johnson (1983) investigated the appropriateness and relevance of Little's conclusions in an Australian setting. He attempted to identify what a selection of teachers and principals in New South Wales perceived to be the "critical practices" leading to a commitment to continuous improvement by school staffs. In order to answer his research question, Johnson first isolated the staff norms or expectations for teachers' behaviour which contribute to a desire for continuous professional growth. In his research, Johnson also attempted to discover whether there were certain characteristics of the work setting which inhibited the attainment of an atmosphere favourable to staff development. In line with Little's work, Johnson also investigated the principal's role in promoting within the school's staff a desire for continuous improvement of teaching practices. Johnson's work built upon and greatly extended preliminary research conducted by Duignan (1982) on the role of the principal in staff development.

A number of common themes or consistent perceptions emerge which may have implications for the promotion of staff development in Australian schools.

The staff behavioural norms of collegiality and enterprise, which underpin Little's North American plan, were widely accepted by participants in this study as representing the staff attitudes which should be fostered at school. These staff expectations for teachers' behaviour were viewed as the means of influencing individuals to desire continuous improvement of their teaching practices. A number of staff interactions, or critical staff practices, were perceived as contributing to the development of these staff norms. It is these specific practices, then, which influential persons within the school should encourage, in order to foster continuous teaching improvement. However, a number of characteristics of the Australian school environment inhibit the attainment of the work group expectations and practices, and these should be taken into account when formulating an approach to staff development. Most importantly, the school principal was identified as playing a key role in staff development within the school setting.

Johnson concludes that two staff group norms influence continuous growth at school. Firstly, there is a general attitude amongst staff that work will, as a matter of course, be planned, discussed, designed and evaluated jointly. Secondly, teachers expect to regularly evaluate their existing teaching practices and to develop and experiment with new methods in an effort to continuously improve their classroom teaching. These norms are very similar to Little's norms of collegiality and experimentation. These norms are evidenced and created in a selection of Australian schools by six work-group interactions or critical staff practices.

1 Shared talk. Within the staff group, there is regular and widespread discussion about classroom practices;
2 Joint preparation. Curriculum and materials are, as a matter of course, prepared together by staff;
3 Informing. Teachers frequently inform each other of the approaches they use in their classrooms;
4 Inservice, with reporting. Teachers regularly attend, and glean ideas for classroom practice from, organised programmes of inservice outside the school. These ideas are then discussed and evaluated by staff members, with a view to possible implementation;
5 Interschool Joint Preparation. Faculty and other groups of teachers on the staff design and evaluate classroom strategies and materials in conjunction with teachers and consultants from outside the school;
6 Social Contact. Members of the staff group interact socially within and beyond school house.

A number of characteristics of the work setting may constrain the development of the desired staff group norms and practices. Some of these are the uncooperative and unenthusiastic personalities of some individuals, the sometimes threatening nature of collegial work, the promotion system, and the local community.

The principal's role in fostering continuous professional growth is effected through the following nine practices;

1 Announcing expectations. The principal should regularly state his desire for teachers to adopt a collegial and enterprising approach to work;

2 Enacting expectations. By his own behaviour, the principal should model the desired norms of expectation;
3 Sanctioning behaviour. The principal should use appropriate techniques for approving or disapproving teachers' practices. In particular, he needs to reward collegial and enterprising effort by teachers;
4 Sanctioned Protecting. It is important that the principal encourage staff to inform him of their intentions for new approaches to classroom teaching. Once he has approved those new methods, he should support and protect those activities in the face of potential criticism;
5 Encouraging Staff Involvement. The principal should promote generally high staff morale and enthusiasm at school. This he can do by encouraging teachers to participate in a range of school activities.
6 Evidencing Availability and Approachability. The principal needs to be visible and accessible to staff, and should display his willingness to discuss teaching practices with teachers;
7 Socialising. It is important for the principal to participate in formal and informal staff social interaction;
8 Facilitating Enterprise. The principal should assist and encourage staff in their efforts to experiment with new teaching methods in their classrooms; and
9 Being Aware. Finally, it is important that the principal makes himself aware of, and generally knowledgable about, teachers' classroom practices.

Certain features inherent in the work setting are likely to hamper the principal's efforts in promoting an atmosphere of continuous professional growth of staff at school. Some of these concern the available time of the principal, his lack of involvement in teaching, his personality, the effects of his other work responsibilities on staff respect, as well as the constraining influence of community opinion on his practices.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Based upon the common themes which emerged from the findings, a framework of tentative propositions is now presented to guide future research.

Proposition 1:
> An atmosphere or desire for continuous professional growth of Australian teachers can be influenced by norms of collegiality and enterprise at school.

Evidence obtained in this study suggest that the work group attitudes of collegiality and enterprise may exercise a significant influence on teachers' desires for continuous improvement of classroom practices. These two norms of expectation should, therefore, be promoted within the work group.

Proposition 2:
> Six critical staff practices promote the attainment of these norms within the staff group. They are: talk; joint preparation; informing; inservice, with reporting; intraschool joint preparation; and social contact.

The Australian school practitioners whose perceptions were sought in this research frequently recommended these six interactions of teachers as evidencing and encouraging the development of collegiality and enterprise within the work group setting at school.

Proposition 3:
> Certain characteristics of the Australian school environment may constrain the development of these work group attitudes and interactions.

Whilst there was significant variation in perceptions in this regard, the findings did suggest that a number of factors inherent in the school context limit the attainment of continuous professional growth of staff. Most often mentioned were the matters of individual personalities, the nature of collegiality, staff time, the Department of Education promotion system, and the influence of the community.

Proposition 4:
> The Australian school principal has a major role to play in promoting an atmosphere of staff development at school.

Perceptions overwhelmingly supported a need for the principal's involvement in fostering collegiality and enterprise at school. In the first place, it was suggested that constraining influences are likely to prevent the achievement of collegial and enterprising work group expectations without active intervention by someone in the school. In the second place, the principal was perceived to be primarily responsible for that promotion, as well as being the person most able to exercise an influential role.

Proposition 5:
> Nine critical principal practices comprise the main techniques by which the Australian principal can fulfil his role in staff development. They are: announcing; enacting; sanctioning (with a positive emphasis); sanctioned protecting; encouraging staff involvement; evidencing availability and approachability; socialising; facilitating enterprise; and being aware.

This study produced evidence which frequently recommended these nine specific practices as the fundamental strategies by which the principal can influence staff development at school. Whilst a number of other practices were also proposed as critical, they were less often and less strongly supported.

Proposition 6:
> A number of constraining forces may limit the principal's effectiveness in fostering an atmosphere of staff development in Australian schools.

The findings from this research suggest that certain features of the Australian school environment constrain the principal in promoting the norms of collegiality and entperise within the school. Most commonly advanced were the matters of the principal's time, the principal's lack of personal involvement in classroom teaching, a shy and non-communicative principal personality, the effect of administrative actions on staff respect, and the restrictive influence of the community.

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